

half of her 8-hour shift. "I work on the belt. I help push carts upstairs sometimes. I wash plates, pick silverware—I do everything."

Shapiro landed the job after interning at the hospital while a student at Rock Terrace School, a public campus in Rockville that serves 112 special-needs children in grades 6 through 12. "I live in a group home and I have to pay the rent there," said Shapiro, her dark curls tucked neatly under a hairnet. "And I have to work, or else they'll ask me to leave. I don't want to leave my friends. I don't want to leave my house. It's too nice."

The work isn't easy. The employees, clad in blue uniforms and white plastic aprons, remove trash and utensils from used trays as they navigate across a water-slicked red tile floor. Many wear earplugs to block out the drone of the industrial dishwasher that cleans the dishes and trays that pass through it on a conveyor belt before the workers retrieve and stack them in neat piles. Shifts begin at 5:30 a.m. and finish as late as 7 p.m.

James Eastridge, 38, another former Rock Terrace student, has worked in the kitchen for 22 years. That is long enough for him to earn several promotions and enough money to buy a house in Hagerstown, where he lives with his parents.

"I started out when I was 16 years old and just kept on working; the years just flew by," he said. "I hope we get to keep the jobs. When I was in school, I was pretty wild. They got me in the job . . . and I've been doing good ever since I've been here."

Randy Severt, a teacher at Rock Terrace, said more than 300 students have interned or worked at the hospital since the school formed a partnership with the institution in 1979. The Navy got reliable, long-serving employees for hard-to-fill positions. The students, who earn between \$9.42 and \$12.80 an hour, were given an opportunity to work, learn about money management and become more self-sufficient.

Providing such opportunities is a long-standing goal of the Federal government. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 banned discrimination against disabled people in Federal hiring and required agencies to develop affirmative action plans to hire more people with disabilities.

Most of the scullery workers joined the hospital under a Federal hiring authority that allows agencies to take on people with mental retardation as provisional employees, then convert them to permanent status after 2 years of satisfactory service. The government employed 1,734 mentally retarded workers in 2000, about one-tenth of 1 percent of the 1.8 million-strong Federal civilian workforce, according to the Office of Personnel Management. (Overall, more than 120,000 disabled people worked for the government that year, more than 7 percent of the Federal workforce.)

If the hospital scullery work goes to a private contractor, it will mean a big adjustment for a group of workers who, due to circumstances and disability, do not cope well with change, Severt said.

"They have problems finding jobs on their own. They don't advocate well for themselves and they don't have a lot of skills," Severt said. "Some of them can speak well. Some of them have very good social skills. But they are retarded, and they need help every step of the way. They just don't adapt."

Hospital officials say the quality of the work isn't at issue. "They're very loyal employees," said Cmdr. Martie Slaughter, the hospital's nutrition manager. "I've only been here for 2 years and they are like my family."

In similar competitions across the government, the in-house bid has triumphed more

than half the time, according to the OMB. Even in the cases where the private sector has won, the employees often have gone to work for the contractor. But the scullery employees are at a decided disadvantage.

"If you are special needs, you have a great need for greater supervision," Slaughter said. "And we all know that supervision costs money."

Jerry Leener, whose son Mike, 27, has worked at the hospital for 8 years, said that even a White House focused on the bottom line should realize there is little to be gained by contracting out the work. Displaced employees would turn to government entitlement programs, including Federal disability payments, Medicaid and food stamps.

"If our kids lose their jobs, the Federal government is still going to have to compensate them," Leener said. "Either way, it's going to be coming out of Federal funds. So we haven't had a cost saving as it relates to these kids. What's more, we've displaced them from their passion. They love working here. They love being a part of this."

Military officials have been sympathetic but unmoved. Slaughter said that early on in the process she asked about getting a waiver for the workers, but none was forthcoming. Over the last year, parents of some workers have written to Navy officials and members of Congress seeking help, but with no concrete results.

As recently as 2 weeks ago, Navy officials said they were still studying the situation. Parents of the workers grew nervous as a December deadline loomed for the hospital to submit its bid to keep the scullery jobs in-house. They were told that a decision on whether a contractor would take over could come as soon as March.

Then on Oct. 2, 10 days after Van Hollen's visit to the scullery and after inquiries by the Washington Post, Navy officials passed the word internally that they had been directed to temporarily stop working on the job competition. "The study has not been cancelled, but postponed until further notice," an internal e-mail said.

Parents said they were given a vague explanation that the job competition had gone on longer than current law permits. A provision in the recently passed 2004 Defense Appropriations bill blocks new funding for single-function job competitions that have exceeded 24 months, and multifunction competitions that have exceeded 30 months. Navy officials at the hospital did not respond to two requests for more information about the decision.

"I have a suspicion that they were starting to feel political pressure and decided to put it on hold, and that maybe this thing would blow over," said Leener, who added that he remains uncertain about whether his son's job is safe. "We took it as a big victory, believe me, but it's a temporary one."

Trent Duffy, an OMB spokesman, said agencies may cancel job competitions that jeopardize protected workers, such as veterans or disabled people. "It is permissible for agencies to make that determination and cancel a competition because these protected populations, these certain people, could potentially lose their livelihoods," Duffy said. "They absolutely have that discretion under the law." Van Hollen, who wrote a letter to Bush urging him to halt the study, said he viewed the Navy's decision as little more than political expediency. He still believes competitive sourcing is "a one-size-fits-all contracting-out policy that does not take into account other important goals of the federal government," he said.

"I still think it's an example of their policy run amok," Van Hollen said. "There's no doubt what happened here. You want to applaud the Navy for reversing its decision, but

you can't have a member of Congress or a member of the press visit every site where you've got . . . contracting out going on with model programs."

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. GERALD D. KLECZKA

OF WISCONSIN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 7, 2004

Mr. KLECZKA. Mr. Speaker, on the evening of Tuesday, October 5 and on Wednesday, October 6, I was not present for business on the floor of the House due to personal business and was thereby absent for votes on rollcall Nos. 494 through 501. Had I been present, I would have voted "no" on rollcall No. 494; "yea" on rollcall No. 495; "yea" on rollcall No. 496; "yea" on rollcall No. 497; "yea" on rollcall No. 498; "no" on rollcall No. 499; "no" on rollcall No. 500; and "yea" on rollcall No. 501.

RECOGNIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ARTS IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

HON. BRAD MILLER

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 7, 2004

Mr. MILLER of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, throughout the country there has been a rebirth of the arts, and the importance of the arts to economic development and revitalization in our communities deserves to be recognized. Cultural facilities and events enhance property values, tax resources and overall profitability for our cities and towns. In doing so, the arts have become a direct contributor to reviving many of our urban and rural areas. From major metropolitan areas to small towns, the arts have proven to be sound economic investments. I value the contributions made by the arts and believe that Congress has a responsibility to support the arts and all cultural activities.

Nationally, the arts have had a profound effect on community development but more specifically, have assisted in the economic growth in my home state of North Carolina. I am pleased to present an article by Mr. Lawrence J. Wheeler, Director of the North Carolina Museum of Art, that brings attention to the development and economic effect that the arts have had in North Carolina. In his editorial entitled "For Development, Draw on N.C.'s Arts," which appeared in the News & Observer earlier this year, Mr. Wheeler provides insight into the positive influence that the arts have had upon communities in North Carolina. Mr. Wheeler rightfully calls on the arts to be used as full partners in future economic planning, and I believe that Congress and state governments should heed this advice.

[Editorial—Opinion—the News & Observer, April 27, 2004]

FOR DEVELOPMENT, DRAW ON N.C.'S ARTS

Twenty years ago, the idea of using art as a tool for community development would have been dismissed as a meddlesome intrusion by self-interested arts advocates. But as more and more jobs are being outsourced and downtown areas are becoming ghost towns,